



acjrd

# December 2025 Seminar Report

## DECEMBER SEMINAR & NETWORKING EVENT



HIGH VOLUME BUT LOW-LEVEL CRIME: A DIALOGUE  
THURSDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2025

THE BLUE ROOM, LAW SOCIETY OF IRELAND,  
BLACKHALL PLACE, DUBLIN 7

REGISTRATION @ 5 PM  
SEMINAR @ 5.30 - 7PM  
RECEPTION @ 7 - 8 PM

### Speakers:

Acting Deputy Commissioner  
Paul Cleary, An Garda Síochána;  
Dr Ian Marder, Associate Professor,  
Maynooth University;  
Arnold Dillon, Director, Retail Ireland;  
Siobhán Brennan, Family Therapist &  
Bridie Flood, Senior Project Worker,  
The Diamond Project.



December Networking Event speakers (l to r): Arnold Dillon, Acting Deputy Commissioner Paul Cleary, Dr Ian Marder, Bridie Flood, Siobhán Brennan and Chairperson, Mary Griffin, Chair, ACJRD

### SPEAKERS

**Arnold Dillon, Director of Retail Ireland**, an IBEC trade association representing retailers from major multinational corporations to SMEs, sole traders and small shops. Retail Ireland advocates across multiple policy domains including skills development, business costs, and environmental regulation. It has become increasingly engaged with retail crime and staff welfare issues, which have emerged as major concerns for members in recent years.

**Paul Cleary, Acting Deputy Commissioner, An Garda Síochána** has 32 years of policing experience serving in a variety of operational policing roles throughout his service. He previously worked as Assistant Commissioner for the Dublin Metropolitan area and has developed extensive expertise in city-centre policing and understanding the impacts retail crime has on both businesses and communities.

**Dr Ian Marder, Criminologist, Maynooth University** specialises in the intersection of research, policy, and practice. While volume crime is not his primary research focus, Ian has concentrated significant effort on improving dialogue between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners regarding evidence-based crime prevention and the evaluation of existing interventions.

**Bridie Flood, Senior Project Worker, and Siobhán Brennan, Family Therapist, The Diamond Project.** Bridie works directly with young people involved in criminal activity and their families and is passionate about bringing change to their lives. Siobhán brings clinical expertise to understanding intergenerational trauma and systemic factors which influence youth offending. The Diamond Project was established in September 2024 and represents a new approach to youth justice interventions in Dublin's north inner city, operating beyond traditional diversion programmes and emphasising restorative practices and family-centred support.

### Introduction

The annual December Seminar and Networking Event was held in the Law Society of Ireland on Thurs 11<sup>th</sup> December 2025 on the theme of *High Volume but Low-Level Crime*. It was moderated by Mary Griffin, ACJRD Chair. This is a high-level summary of the dialogue.

The seminar brought together speakers from policing, academia, retail sector representation, and youth justice services to discuss recent developments in retail crime in Ireland, its broader social and economic context, and the interventions currently in place to address it. The discussion explored changes in retail crime trends, their underlying causes, the impacts on businesses and communities, and the role of collaborative, evidence-based responses in preventing and addressing offending behaviour, particularly among young people.

Retail crime was framed not only as an economic issue but also as a societal concern with implications for worker safety, community stability, and the justice system. Speakers emphasised the importance of understanding retail crime within wider social, economic, and institutional contexts, and highlighted the need for coordinated interventions involving law enforcement, policymakers, communities, and support services.

### Changing Nature and Trends in Retail Crime

A key question was whether there has been a significant shift in retail crime patterns in recent years, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. A marked increase in both the frequency and severity of incidents affecting retail businesses and staff was hypothesised. This includes theft, verbal abuse, and physical intimidation directed at retail workers. These incidents have raised serious concerns about employee safety and wellbeing, as well as the sustainability of retail operations, especially for smaller businesses with limited capacity to absorb losses.

Retail crime was described as having evolved beyond opportunistic shoplifting for some to include more organised and persistent forms of offending. Retail workers, who had been widely recognised as essential frontline workers during the pandemic, have increasingly reported being exposed to hostility, including verbal abuse, racism, and anti-social behaviour. This deterioration in workplace conditions has contributed to declining morale among retail staff and challenges in retaining workers in the sector.

Some speakers suggested that there has been a measurable increase in retail crime in recent years, and that recent policing initiatives have contributed to stabilisation and improved detection rates. Increased police visibility and targeted enforcement strategies have been associated with reductions in certain forms of aggressive and abusive behaviour in retail environments. Retail crime is not a victimless offence; its consequences extend beyond financial loss to include psychological harm to staff and broader community impacts.

It was debated whether there has been growing involvement of young people in retail crime, particularly those aged between approximately 10 and 14 years was highlighted. These young individuals are often recruited or influenced by older peers or adults, sometimes as part of organised criminal activity. Practitioners described how criminal behaviour can become normalised within certain social environments, particularly where offending is intergenerational and embedded in family or community contexts.

The discussion also identified broader structural factors contributing to increased offending. Economic pressures, including the rising cost of living, housing insecurity, and social deprivation, were seen as important drivers of both opportunistic and organised retail crime. It was emphasised that offending behaviour is often linked to unmet needs, limited opportunities, and adverse childhood experiences, rather than purely individual choice.

### **Social and Structural Contexts of Offending**

Speakers observed the importance of situating retail crime within broader social and structural frameworks. Intergenerational trauma, poverty, and marginalisation can contribute to cycles of criminal behaviour. In some cases, young people involved in retail crime come from families with long histories of contact with the criminal justice system, creating patterns that can be difficult to break without targeted intervention.

Family dynamics and community environments were highlighted as particularly influential. Young people can be exposed to criminal activity from an early age, shaping their perceptions of acceptable behaviour and limiting their exposure to alternative pathways. Practitioners noted that young people may be exploited

by older individuals or drawn into criminal activity through peer influence, coercion, or economic necessity.

The complexity of measuring crime trends accurately was noted. Victimisation surveys were identified as a valuable tool for understanding crime prevalence, as many offences go unreported. Changes in reported crime levels may reflect shifts in reporting behaviour or policing practices rather than actual increases in offending. Increased media attention and political focus on specific types of crime can also influence reporting patterns and enforcement priorities.

Research evidence suggests that punitive approaches alone may have limited effectiveness in reducing crime. Longer prison sentences and zero-tolerance enforcement strategies do not consistently demonstrate clear deterrent effects. Instead, community-based interventions, early intervention programmes, and restorative justice approaches are often more effective in reducing reoffending and promoting long-term behavioural change.

### **Law Enforcement and Policy Responses**

Several initiatives designed to address retail crime more effectively were outlined. These included intelligence-led operations targeting repeat offenders and organised criminal groups, as well as increased police presence in high-risk retail areas. High-visibility policing was identified as particularly effective in reducing offending and improving public confidence. Retail crime involves a diverse range of offenders, including vulnerable individuals stealing for survival, opportunistic offenders, and organised criminal groups operating across multiple locations. Tailored responses are required to address these different forms of offending effectively.

It was also emphasised that law enforcement alone cannot resolve the issue. Retail crime exists within a broader ecosystem involving social services, the justice system, policymakers, and community organisations. Effective responses require collaboration across sectors to address both immediate risks and underlying causes.

Frustrations among retailers with aspects of the criminal justice process were highlighted, including perceived leniency in sentencing and repeat offending. Some offenders accumulate multiple convictions but continue to engage in criminal behaviour, creating a sense of impunity and undermining confidence among retailers and staff. Retail organisations have advocated for balanced approaches that combine enforcement with investment in public services and prevention.

### **Youth Justice and Restorative Interventions**

The role of youth justice diversion programmes in preventing and reducing criminal behaviour among

young people was explained. Practitioners described a restorative approach centred on addressing harm, rebuilding relationships, and supporting young people to develop positive alternatives to offending. The programmes work intensively with young people and their families, recognising that individual behaviour cannot be separated from family and community contexts. Interventions include family therapy, mentoring, education support, and assistance in accessing employment or training opportunities. By strengthening relationships and support networks, these programmes aim to reduce the likelihood of reoffending and promote long-term positive outcomes.

Restorative practices were highlighted as particularly valuable in helping young people understand the consequences of their actions and take responsibility for harm caused. These approaches emphasise accountability while avoiding the negative consequences of early criminalisation, which can reinforce offending behaviour and limit future opportunities.

Many young people involved in offending behaviour express a desire to change but lack the resources and opportunities to do so. Providing access to education, employment, and supportive relationships is essential in enabling young people to pursue alternative pathways.

Breaking intergenerational cycles of offending was identified as a critical priority. Early intervention, particularly during early adolescence, offers an opportunity to disrupt patterns of criminal behaviour before they become entrenched. Collaborative work involving families, schools, community organisations, and law enforcement can play a crucial role in supporting positive change.

## Collaboration and Evidence-Based Approaches

The seminar emphasised the importance of collaboration between stakeholders in addressing retail crime. Effective responses require coordinated efforts involving law enforcement, retailers, policymakers, researchers, and community organisations. Information sharing, joint initiatives, and integrated support services were identified as essential components of successful intervention strategies.

Research plays a crucial role in informing policy and practice. Evidence-based approaches can help identify effective interventions and ensure that resources are allocated efficiently. Ongoing evaluation is necessary to assess the effectiveness of existing programmes and identify areas for improvement.

Participants highlighted the need for balanced responses that combine enforcement with prevention and support. While policing plays an essential role in addressing immediate risks, long-term solutions require addressing underlying social and economic factors that contribute to criminal behaviour.

*Our thanks to Kissmat Temidire Salami and Dylan McClave, Maynooth University for their work in*


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